General capabilities and cross-curriculum dimensions

Q: What are the general capabilities and cross-curriculum dimensions?

A: The Australian Curriculum is underpinned by 10 general capabilities. These are:

- literacy
- numeracy
- information and communication technology
- thinking skills
- creativity
- self management
- teamwork
- intercultural understanding
- ethical behaviour
- social competence.

The curriculum will be explicit about how the general capabilities are to be addressed in each learning area and how links can be made across the curriculum.

Three cross-curriculum dimensions are also dealt with explicitly in the Australian Curriculum:

- Indigenous history and culture
- a commitment to sustainable living
- Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia.

Good teaching in each of the learning areas will always contribute to a student’s development of general capabilities and understanding of the cross-curriculum dimensions. The Australian Curriculum reinforces this expectation by incorporating the general capabilities and cross-curriculum dimensions into the content descriptions, in ways appropriate to each learning area.

Q: What is ACARA doing to support the inclusion of these in the Australian Curriculum?

A: ACARA is developing continuums of knowledge, skills and understanding for each of the general capabilities and the cross-curriculum dimensions.

In writing the Australian Curriculum, considerable attention has been paid to the development of literacy and numeracy as the foundations on which much further learning depends. The foundation for literacy has been built primarily in English and the foundation for numeracy primarily in mathematics, however, as two of the general capabilities, literacy and numeracy skills are addressed explicitly in the content of all learning areas.

To support curriculum writers in describing literacy and numeracy demands at an appropriate level, literacy and numeracy continuums are being developed, describing literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills at the end of Years 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10. The literacy and numeracy continuums have been written to take account of and build on the knowledge and skills in the English and mathematics learning areas, as well as existing national and international continuums, current data and research.

The literacy and numeracy continuums will guide the writing and reviewing of curriculum across the learning areas with a focus on providing instructions to writers about appropriate attention to literacy and numeracy content to be included in the curriculum. They will also serve to inform the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in future years.

For each of the other eight capabilities and the three cross-curriculum dimensions, continuums of learning are being developed over three stages (end Year 2, end Year 6, end Year 10) to assist curriculum writers in all learning areas.

All continuums will be used to review the draft English, mathematics, science and history curriculum to ensure that there is strong and coherent inclusion of the general capabilities and cross-curriculum dimensions in the final curriculum. They will also be used to assist the writers of the Australian Curriculum in the other learning areas during future phases of development.
As the continuums are developed, ACARA will review their place in the documentation of the Australian Curriculum and seek advice from stakeholders as to how they might most usefully assist schools to develop their teaching and learning programs.

**Q: How will the Australian Curriculum take into account the diverse needs of students and ensure the curriculum is accessible for all students?**

**A:** The Australian Curriculum has been developed to meet the needs of every student – through setting curriculum content and achievement standards that establish high expectations for all students.

ACARA will not set different expectations for different groups of students when developing the Australian Curriculum. However, the curriculum provides flexibility for teachers to take into account the different rates at which students develop; and how the content and context cater for varied levels of students’ ability.

Advisory panels with a focus on equity and diversity and stages of schooling are assisting ACARA with this task.

Particular consideration is also being given to how ACARA can best meet the needs of students for whom English is another language or dialect, and the needs of students with disabilities.

Working groups have been established to provide advice on the additional actions ACARA can take to ensure that the Australian Curriculum meets the needs of all students. There will be further discussion on achievement standards and assessment for students with disabilities throughout 2010.

**Q: How has ACARA included the history and culture of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in the draft Australian Curriculum?**

**A:** The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum* paper states that:

*The advent of an Australian Curriculum also offers a unique opportunity to ensure that all young Australians learn about the history and cultural background of the nation’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, of the contribution that has been made to Australia, and of the impact that colonial settlement has had on Indigenous communities, past and present. For Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, an Australian curriculum provides the opportunity to establish and pursue excellence within education settings that respect and promote their cultural identity.*

To meet this expectation curriculum writers were provided with advice and feedback from two national forums on Indigenous education conducted in 2009 to discuss curriculum development work.

For both forums, ACARA issued invitations to the Chairs of the Indigenous Education Consultative Body in each state and territory and requested nominations for Indigenous representatives and/or expertise from state and territory curriculum and education authorities across the Catholic, Independent and Government sectors.

To strengthen advice in this area, in early 2010, ACARA will:

- appoint an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, with appropriate expertise, to its Curriculum Committee
- establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel to provide advice on curriculum and assessment programs
- appoint Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander writers with relevant expertise.